

Northern Irelandâ€™s political instability is grow...

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It is quite extraordinary for a political party leader to last less than three weeks in office, unless the party in question is UKIP, of course. But that is what Edwin Poots of the DUP has managed.

Let us leave aside how hopelessly ill-qualified Poots was for the task of leading any significant political party. Let's instead note the consequences of his having first ousted Arlene Foster as First Minister of Northern Ireland and as DUP leader, and then note his own refusal to replace her himself, before then noting that he and his nominee to that post have now alienated DUP opinion by tacitly accepting that Westminster has out-maneuvred them by agreeing a Westminster legislative route to delivering an Irish language bill for Northern Ireland, which has long been a Sinn Fein demand.

I support Sinn Fein in its demand for this bill. The suppression of the Irish language has long been a mechanism for the imposition of colonial power. My own name is, after all, an Anglicised and imposed version of the proper Irish, which in older Irish was O'Murchadha or more recently O'Murchu (and I am aware I am using male forms, because I am male). Why should that have been tolerated?

The issue may seem obscure, but it is at the core of the Unionist issue. The DUP wish to deny a right to those of Irish origin in the North - who may now be a majority of its population. They do so to support their view of the right of other countries in the United Kingdom to rule the six counties of Northern Ireland in a partisan fashion.

That last phrase is key. I am not going to discuss the rights and wrongs of the partition of Ireland here. I am going to say that the mood of most now is that partisanship around issues relating to the rule of any place with a profoundly colonial past is deeply divisive. The DUP know that. And they know that they are inciting partisan division as a consequence.

Poots, for all his very obvious failings, compromised. The DUP is having none of it. He is already being consigned to history.

The question is, what next? To the surprise of Tories, Northern Ireland votes on partisan lines. That may be to be regretted, but it has also been true. Until recently, that is. The increasingly unreasonable lines from the DUP, and its total incompetence on Brexit, has made it hard for an increasing number to tolerate. Sinn Fein, with all the stigma of its past still apparent to many, has moved in the opposite direction, cementing itself in political processes. And in between the Alliance Party has made gains.

What would happen if an election has to be called now in Northern Ireland, with Brexit inflaming tensions and the DUP in chaos? It is very hard to predict. I will not do so. But what seems clear is that Unionism is in a cul-de-sac of its own making from which the exit is not clear, whilst nationalists offer solutions in a way that few ever thought possible, and all because the Conservatives abandoned Northern Ireland in a way many could never have imagined.

This is a nightmare scenario when we have a UK government perpetually spinning lies about its own position on Northern Ireland in the context of Brexit. The prospects for stability do not look good. This should be of concern to us all.